

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

In October 2020, environmental organizations and hydropower companies, in a process organized by Stanford University, reached an historic agreement, pledging in a “Joint Statement of Collaboration” to work together on the “3Rs” – the rehabilitation, retrofit, and removal of America’s 90,000 dams to help address climate change by both advancing the renewable energy and electricity storage benefits of hydropower and the environmental and economic benefits of healthy rivers.¹ We encourage you to include substantial funding and other support in your forthcoming infrastructure package and related proposals to advance the 3Rs at dams across the nation. Pursuing this course will increase clean energy production, promote river conservation and public safety, and create good-paying jobs, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

Hydropower is a proven energy technology and provides the United States with more than seven percent of its electricity.² In addition to generating consistent electricity, hydropower facilities also “firm up” variable solar and wind power, with pumped-storage hydropower³ currently providing more than 90 percent of all U.S. electricity storage.⁴ The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that by retrofitting existing powered dams, adding generating capacity at some of the 97% of U.S. dams that are not powered, and developing new pump storage facilities, U.S. hydropower electricity output could increase by approximately 50 percent by 2050,⁵ substantially cutting CO₂ emissions while supporting nearly 200,000 clean energy jobs.⁶

Rehabilitating dams is also an important way to improve public safety. There are nearly 6,000 “high-hazard” dams across the country with poor, unsatisfactory, or unknown safety ratings that would pose a threat to human life should they fail.⁷ The nation’s high hazard dams have an estimated \$22 billion repair backlog.⁸ The May 2020 failure of Michigan’s Edenville and Sanford dams – and a near-miss in California at the nation’s tallest dam, with 180,000 people evacuated – are harbingers of potential future disasters for communities around the country with unsafe dams. It is critical that the United States invests in rehabilitating dams to avoid future costly calamities.

¹ [NY Times, October 13, 2020](#); [Uncommon Dialogue Joint Statement to the U.S. Congress](#); the negotiation was led by Stanford University through its Uncommon Dialogue process, in collaboration with the Energy Futures Initiative, led by former DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz.

² <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=427&t=3>

³ <https://www.energy.gov/eere/water/pumped-storage-hydropower>

⁴ <https://www.eesi.org/papers/view/energy-storage-2019>

⁵ Department of Energy, *Hydropower Vision*, p. 1

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3

⁷ Congressional Research Service, *Dam Safety Overview and the Federal Role*, Anna E. Normand, October 24, 2019. p. 10

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11

There are also ample opportunities to remove unnecessary dams that no longer provide benefits to society, have safety issues that cannot be cost-effectively mitigated, or have significant and longstanding adverse environmental impacts that cannot be addressed. Dam removals can restore the natural functions of rivers, return extirpated and endangered fish species to the rivers, protect environmental and cultural resources important to communities, and increase the climate resilience of U.S. rivers. For example, the dams in the western United States have impacted the salmon runs which have significant natural, cultural and economic importance to the region.

Maine's Penobscot River is a good overall example of what can be achieved when industry parties work together towards mutual goals. In 2004, the Penobscot Nation, environmental organizations, and the hydropower industry reached a landmark agreement that led to the removal of two large dams and rehabilitated and retrofitted other hydropower facilities to improve fish passage, increase their generating capacity, and advance safety. After \$65 million of work was completed in 2016, more than 2,000 miles of river habitat were reopened for the endangered Atlantic salmon, total hydropower generation was increased, and the river's role as the center of Penobscot tribal culture was improved. More work needs to be done in the Penobscot basin, but this recent effort points to a promising direction for rivers nationwide.

Mr. President, by including funding, tax incentives and other federal support for the rehabilitation, retrofit and removal of the nation's 90,000 dams in your forthcoming infrastructure package and related proposals, you can help improve public safety, increase free-flowing rivers, expand low-carbon generation, and create jobs. We strongly urge you to pursue this course and look forward to working in partnership with you to secure America's clean energy future.

Sincerely,



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress



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